

# AUSTRALIA PRIVATE PRACTICE SALARY & MARKET REPORT JANUARY 2024



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# OVERVIEW

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During 2023, firms generally adopted a conservative and targeted approach to hiring, which was in contrast to the high-growth hiring strategy often implemented in the previous two years.

High value was placed on retaining and attracting lawyers at 4PQE and above, in particular, Senior Associates were in high demand. Due to economic uncertainty there was a reduction in substantial salary increases. Annual and Sign-On bonuses were also not as abundant compared to 2021 and 2022, as firms tightened budgets to consolidate, rather than trying to continually out bid their competitors to acquire legal talent.

As we moved into Financial Year 23/24, market sentiment improved and we began to see an increase in hiring from firms at all PQE levels. The final quarter of 2023 saw a modest return of global recruitment in major markets such as the UK and US and there have been a number of lawyers departing internationally, which has created job vacancies at leading Australian firms.

The expectation for 2024 is that this trend will continue and there will be greater numbers of lawyers making the move abroad, compared to 2023. Partners at law firms report that they have a cautious yet positive outlook for 2024 and we anticipate law firm demand to continue increasing, which should provide an attractive platform for job seekers, with more vacancies and increasing salaries. It remains to be seen if we will see the widespread return of Sign-On bonuses for those moving laterally.

Please get in touch with any of our team for career advice or to discuss the market, salaries and vacancies - we are happy to assist.

**Alex Gotch**  
Director & Qualified Lawyer  
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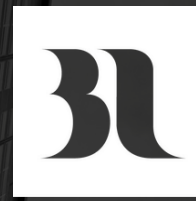
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# SALARY TABLES

All figures are average salaries, in Australian Dollars, and are inclusive of base salary and superannuation.

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# SYDNEY

As a global city and economic hub, Sydney distinguishes itself as a prime location for legal professionals seeking a dynamic and competitive environment. The appeal for lawyers lies in its economic significance, global connectivity and high quality of life.

There was an initial slowdown in recruitment and appetite to hire for the first half of 2023, but we experienced a significant recovery in the second half of the year. With market sentiment improving in the 23/24 Financial Year, Sydney firms began to hire with a targeted focus on experienced lawyers 3PQE and up. There were also strategic Senior Associate mandates driven by practices wanting to bolster their ability to handle increased workloads and address gaps they may have had in succession plans.

With 'Big-6' firms taking a more conservative approach to recruitment than the preceding two years, leading international and national firms were able to secure a greater share of quality mid-level talent and continued their growth through key Partner (and team) hires. There was a continued and steady flow of Partner moves in Sydney during 2023 across all practice areas.

To close out the year Sydney also began experiencing an influx of international talent heading to our shores. As Sydney remains a highly desirable destination for foreign qualified practitioners in the lead up to summer, we assisted numerous UK, Irish and New Zealand qualified lawyers make the move to Sydney.

Salaries remained relatively stable over the past 6 months, but candidates who made lateral moves were receiving far greater increases in their remuneration compared to those lawyers who's salary only grew in line with inflation.

The strongest areas of demand for Financial Year 23/24 so far have been Construction, Infrastructure, Energy, Real-Estate and Employment. With a reservedly more positive economic outlook expected for the coming year, we expect the demand for Corporate M&A and Finance lawyers to increase as we progress into 2024.

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## Sydney Top-Tier Firms

PQE LEVEL	\$AUD Range	\$AUD Average
1	110,000 - 125,000	115,000
2	125,000 - 145,000	135,000
3	140,000 - 155,000	145,000
4	150,000 - 165,000	155,000
5	160,000 - 170,000	165,000
SA 1	185,000 - 210,000	195,000
SA 2	200,000 - 235,000	220,000
SA 3	235,000 - 260,000	240,000
SA 4	255,000 - 280,000	260,000
Counsel	275,000 - 360,000	320,000

## Sydney Mid-Tier Firms

PQE LEVEL	\$AUD Range	\$AUD Average
1	85,000 - 100,000	90,000
2	100,000 - 110,000	105,000
3	120,000 - 130,000	125,000
4	135,000 - 150,000	140,000
5	140,000 - 155,000	150,000
SA 1	165,000 - 175,000	170,000
SA 2	170,000 - 190,000	185,000
SA 3	190,000 - 215,000	205,000
SA 4	205,000 - 225,000	215,000
Counsel	230,000 - 280,000	250,000

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# MELBOURNE

Melbourne's growth continued in 2023, breaking into first place as Australia's most populated city and being recognised, globally, as one of the most desirable places to live. Melbourne was ranked as Australia's 'most liveable' city (#3 in the world) by the Economist Intelligence Unit's (EIU) Global Liveability Index, 2023.

Multiple factors continue to contribute to Melbourne's impressive liveability ranking. The city is praised for its excellent infrastructure, more affordable housing and ability to retain strong talent. This is particularly evident when looking at the calibre of the legal market and tenure of the most highly regarded Partners. Melbourne also showcases its diversity through the arts, bars, restaurants and social scene.

The city has also seen salary growth with firms continuing to narrow the gap between Melbourne and Sydney pay (now sitting around the 3-4% mark). These combined factors have meant that it continues to be a very desirable location for both interstate movers and those looking to relocate from overseas. Significantly, we have seen a large number of Melburnians who had relocated internationally during covid, now looking to return home. This has been supplemented by movers from New Zealand, Ireland, South Africa and the UK.

As we enter 2024, there is positivity for continued growth across a range of UK, US and domestically headquartered law firms in Melbourne. We predict continued demand in Construction and Projects, Real Estate, Employment and Litigation. Whilst 2023 saw a focus on Senior Associate level hires, and we expect this to continue, firms increased more junior hiring towards the end of 2023, as workload and pipeline improved compared to the first half of last year. This is a sign of a strong market and reflects that numerous firms and practices are going from strength to strength.

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## Melbourne Top-Tier Firms

PQE LEVEL	\$AUD Range	\$AUD Average
1	105,000 - 120,000	110,000
2	120,000 - 134,000	124,000
3	130,000 - 145,000	135,000
4	135,000 - 155,000	148,000
5	150,000 - 170,000	157,000
SA 1	175,000 - 190,000	176,000
SA 2	190,000 - 210,000	205,000
SA 3	210,000 - 240,000	220,000
SA 4	230,000 - 260,000	240,000
Counsel	250,000 - 350,000	300,000

## Melbourne Mid-Tier Firms

PQE LEVEL	\$AUD Range	\$AUD Average
1	80,000 - 95,000	90,000
2	90,000 - 110,000	100,000
3	100,000 - 120,000	115,000
4	120,000 - 140,000	130,000
5	130,000 - 150,000	140,000
SA 1	145,000 - 165,000	155,000
SA 2	165,000 - 185,000	175,000
SA 3	180,000 - 205,000	195,000
SA 4	190,000 - 220,000	210,000
Counsel	210,000 - 280,000	230,000

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## BRISBANE

Salaries in Brisbane have consistently risen over the past few years, fuelled by the continuous expansion and development of the Queensland market. While the demand for lawyers in Brisbane's legal sector has slightly diminished in the current Financial Year compared to Financial Year 22/23, there remained a strong need for senior lawyers, especially at the Senior Associate level. This demand is prominent in key areas such as Employment & Safety, Real Estate, Construction, Insurance, Planning & Environment and Energy and Resources. Despite economic uncertainties, the legal sector in Queensland is expected to sustain its positive growth trajectory.

Financial Year 2023/24 has so far delivered a sustained demand for lawyers in various practice areas, which has promoted firms to offer competitive salaries in Brisbane, in order to successfully hire in a competitive talent market.

Graduates and junior lawyers have also experienced a substantial increase in their remuneration. It still persists that there is a sizeable gap between mid-tier and top-tier firm salaries at the junior level, due to the lockstep structure governing entry-level roles.

The hosting of the 2032 Olympics in Brisbane is anticipated to further invigorate the economy and infrastructure of both the city and South East Queensland. Additionally, a noteworthy trend is emerging, as lawyers from various states opt to relocate to Brisbane, enticed by its comparatively lower living costs, affordability and superior quality of life.

For comprehensive information on relocating to Brisbane, kindly refer to our guide accessible through this link. [Brisbane Guide - Why Relocate to Brisbane](#)

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## Brisbane Top-Tier Firms

PQE LEVEL	\$AUD Range	\$AUD Average
1	85,000 - 90,000	90,000
2	100,000 - 110,000	105,000
3	115,000 - 125,000	120,000
4	130,000 - 140,000	135,000
5	140,000 - 150,000	145,000
SA 1	155,000 - 165,000	160,000
SA 2	170,000 - 180,000	175,000
SA 3	185,000 - 195,000	190,000
SA 4	195,000 - 210,000	205,000
Counsel	220,000 - 270,000	240,000

## Brisbane Mid-Tier Firms

PQE LEVEL	\$AUD Range	\$AUD Average
1	70,000 - 92,000	85,000
2	90,000 - 105,000	100,000
3	100,000 - 120,000	110,000
4	120,000 - 130,000	125,000
5	130,000 - 145,000	137,000
SA 1	145,000 - 165,000	155,000
SA 2	160,000 - 170,000	165,000
SA 3	170,000 - 182,000	178,000
SA 4	180,000 - 190,000	185,000
Counsel	200,000 - 240,000	220,000

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## ADELAIDE

The Adelaide market saw strong levels of recruitment activity and growth across the first half of Financial Year 23/24. This was driven by the leading firms implementing more expansive talent strategies for 2024 and lawyers seeking higher salaries, as a result of modest increases in mid-year salary reviews.

Retaining talent will be a main challenge for firms' growth strategies in 2024. As Adelaide's leading firms continue the trend of winning interstate work and clients from their larger interstate competitors, there is growing sentiment in the market that salaries should begin to bridge the gap between Adelaide and the Eastern States.

The wage growth of the Eastern States (as well as lifestyle factors) continues to be a drawcard for Adelaide lawyers to take their careers to the larger markets of Melbourne and Sydney. There was notable movement of lawyers from Adelaide interstate during 2023, with the salary gap comfortably accounting for differences in cost of living.

The flip side is that Adelaide does remain an attractive destination for lawyers to settle down. Many lawyers who move interstate early in their careers decide to relocate back home to Adelaide when the time is right. Adelaide's relaxed lifestyle, short commutes and real estate affordability are key attractions.



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## Adelaide Reputable Firms

PQE LEVEL	\$AUD Range	\$AUD Average
1	74,000 - 85,000	80,000
2	85,000 - 105,000	95,000
3	90,000 - 120,000	105,000
4	115,000 - 130,000	120,000
5	125,000 - 140,000	125,000
SA 1	150,000 - 165,000	155,000
SA 2	150,000 - 170,000	165,000
SA 3	160,000 - 175,000	170,000
SA 4	180,000 - 200,000	180,000
Counsel	200,000 - 240,000	220,000



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## PERTH

Perth has long-held the reputation as being a hub of economic activity, with the city being a home to a multitude of ASX-listed entities and global corporates.

Traditionally, the Energy & Resources sector formed a major component of the region's GDP (amounting to close to a third of its value), and typically lawyers involved in E&R-related work tend to be some of the best compensated in Australia.

Significant economic growth, increases in operations across the APAC region (owing in particular to favourable time-zone considerations between Perth and the APAC region), and an influx of investment into Western Australia from Singapore and other Asian markets, has seen the Perth legal market expand more broadly. This has resulted in top-tier, international, and leading national firms investing in experienced hires (i.e. 3-10 PQE) across Corporate E+R, Employment, Insurance, Major Projects, Construction Disputes, Environment & Planning, Project Finance, Competition & Regulatory and more.

Traditionally, Perth salaries have been around 15% less than those found at peer firms in the Eastern Seaboard. However, given the pivot within the market to experienced hires (as indicated above) and the scarcity of lawyers at these levels, we are seeing firms looking to retain and onboard new talent by offering very competitive remuneration packages. The highest average increases have been seen at the sub-SA/Junior SA level which continues to face attrition internationally (e.g. the US, London and Ireland) and interstate. The overarching effect of these factors is that salaries at the leading firms in Perth are now only c. 7-10% lower than their Eastern Seaboard equivalents.

With additional benefits of lower cost of living, more affordable housing and a greater emphasis on work-life-balance, we predict that heading into 2024, interstate movers, Aussie returners, overseas qualified lawyers from London, South Africa or New Zealand are likely to consider Perth an attractive option.

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## Perth Top-Tier Firms

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5	150,000 - 170,000	157,000
SA 1	175,000 - 190,000	176,000
SA 2	190,000 - 210,000	205,000
SA 3	210,000 - 240,000	220,000
SA 4	230,000 - 250,000	240,000
Counsel	250,000 - 350,000	300,000

## Perth Mid-Tier Firms

PQE LEVEL	\$AUD Range	\$AUD Average
1	80,000 - 95,000	90,000
2	90,000 - 110,000	100,000
3	100,000 - 120,000	115,000
4	120,000 - 140,000	130,000
5	130,000 - 150,000	140,000
SA 1	145,000 - 165,000	155,000
SA 2	165,000 - 185,000	175,000
SA 3	180,000 - 205,000	195,000
SA 4	190,000 - 220,000	210,000
Counsel	210,000 - 280,000	230,000

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